

#### Title

The Dommeldal project coordinated by Natuurpunt (BirdLife Partner in Belgium) and Natuurmonumenten in the Netherlands has received one of 6 Best LIFE Nature Project awards in recognition of its focused efforts on habitat restoration in the valley of the Dommel.

This is the fifth year that the [Best LIFE Nature Projects](#) award has honoured the most exemplary projects financed within the framework of the EU's successful LIFE programme. LIFE is a comparatively small funding programme but holds significant value for EU nature conservation. The projects that are made possible by LIFE support have a big impact and lead to long term benefits for nature and society.

The Campine region of Belgium and the Netherlands was once covered in heathland, land dunes, grassland, ferns, marshes and alluvial forest but they have been largely lost or degraded as a consequence of the conversion of land to agriculture, river straightening and land drainage. Now, these natural features have been restored and new opportunities have been created for threatened species, such as the European nightjar, the natterjack toad and the alcon blue butterfly. With help from LIFE funds, 20 ha of wet forests were reestablished and the extensive reed beds are already attracting rare birds such as Eurasian Bittern, Western Marsh Harrier and Savi's Warbler!

The success of the project is closely linked to the involvement of local communities. In order to ensure the continuation of these achievements, local farmers and volunteers have been involved in the management of the area since the end of the project in September 2011. The Life project has helped raise awareness and increase access to the newly-restored sites by creating educational displays, footpaths, boardwalks and a new bridge over the Dommel, which also serves as 'green infrastructure' for species wishing to cross between the eastern and western sides of the nature reserve.

For Ghis Palmans, team coordinator at Hageven De Plateaus, "the Life project's legacy is the possibility of connecting protected areas in the whole region, while providing better habitats and corridors for insects, birds and other species."

*For more information, please visit the Dommeldal project [website](#).*

*Read the [publication](#) "Best Life Nature Projects 2012" by the European Commission.*